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USDA ANNOUNCES AVAILABILITY OF \$8.9 MILLION IN BROADBAND GRANT FUNDS

WASHINGTON, March 29, 2005—Agriculture Acting Under Secretary for Rural Development Gilbert Gonzalez today announced \$8.9 million in broadband grant funds are available for connecting essential community facilities to high-speed telecommunications in rural towns and communities where no broadband service exists.

“The need to expand broadband service is essential to economic growth in these most isolated communities,” said Gonzalez. “Having access to high speed telecommunications for basic community services assists rural communities in meeting public safety needs.”

More than \$30 million in three years have been invested by USDA Rural Development to open the door to broadband infrastructure through the Community Connect Broadband Grant Program. To date, 90 communities have participated in the program to connect essential services of police and fire protection, local government, hospitals, libraries and schools to broadband service. For their part of the project, the communities will make at least 10 computers available to the public with set hours and instruction available for use on the internet. “With this program, we are reaching some of the most remote and challenged communities in rural America,” said Gonzalez.

The notice of funding availability (NOFA) will appear in the March 30, 2005 Federal Register. All publications must be received or carry proof of shipping no later than 60 days after the publication of the NOFA. Submit electronic grant applications at <http://www.grants.gov> and follow the instructions found on the web site. Completed paper applications are to be submitted to the USDA Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 2845, Stop 1550, Washington, DC 20250-1550.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development has invested over \$50 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. As a result, over 800,000 jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.